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Harbaugh's Harfe

(Harbaugh's Harp)

BY

ULYSSES SIDNEY KOONS

A PAPER READ BEFORE
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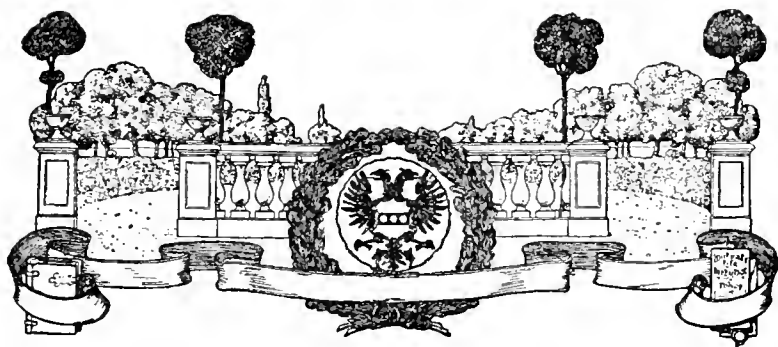
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HEINRICH HARBAUGH.

BORN OCTOBER 28, 1817.

DIED DECEMBER 28, 1867.



“HARBAUGH'S HARFE.”

(HARBAUGH'S HARP.)

ULYSSES S. KOONS.

Not many months ago an intimate friend of mine, knowing my regard and affection for things Pennsylvania-German, handed me a little book, remarking as he did so that he could not read the contents with the exception of the English translations, and that he felt sure the quaint little volume would mean more to me than to him. Imagine my delight when I found myself the proud possessor, and owner by gift, *inter vivos*, of a copy of “Harbaugh's Harfe,” of the first edition, published in 1870, by the Reformed Church Publication Board, of this city, and edited by Dr. Bausman, in a spirit of kindest appreciation and loving memory of his departed friend, Rev. Henry Harbaugh, D.D.

In addition to the foreword, and an introduction containing a short biography of Dr. Harbaugh, by Dr. Bausman, in German, there is a fine little memorial poem in Pennsylvania-German by Dr. Harbaugh's devoted friend, Dr. Weiser, the first verse being as follows:

"Dei' Harf hengt an der Wand im Eck;
 Die Schpinne, die webt 'n Drauer-Deck,
 Mit Schtaab schwertz sie es aus.
 Die Schrauwe all minanner los;
 Die Seede waxe zu mit Moos—
 Der Senger is vum Haus!"

Which may be translated freely:

In the corner hangs thy harp upon the wall;
 The spider, she spins a funeral shroud
 And blackens it o'er with dust.
 The screws are altogether loose,
 The string's grown o'er with mold
 The singer has left the house.

Then come fifteen poems in the Pennsylvania-German, by Dr. Harbaugh, followed by his English translations of "Das alt Schulhaus an der Krick" (The Old Schoolhouse at the Creek), "Der alte Feierheerd" (The Old Fireplace) and "Heemweh" (Homesickness), the first and the last being, possibly, by far the best known of his productions in verse, the book concluding with a glossary, in English and in German, of words peculiarly Pennsylvania-German.

The "Harfe" is illustrated with six wood-cuts made from original drawings. The picture of the old school house, the old mill, the Harbaugh Home, the old hearth were all sketched on the spot in Franklin County, Pa., "Kerchegang in Alter Zeit" (Church Going in Olden Times) and "Heemweh," were drawn by an artist of Reading, a Mr. Devlin, so we are told in the life of Dr. Harbaugh, by his son Linn Harbaugh, Esq., who on the title page very appropriately, having no doubt in mind his father's beautiful poem, "Heemweh," quotes from the German:

“Selig sind die das Heimweh haben,
Denn sie Sollen nach Haus kommen.”
Blessed are they that are homesick
For they shall come to His House.

This life of Dr. Harbaugh, by the way, was also published by the Reformed Church Publication Board, and is so interesting and instructive that together with the “*Harfe*” should be made a part of the library of every member of our society.

It is not the purpose, however, of this article to attempt any biography of Dr. Harbaugh, in view of the excellent and accessible one furnished by his son, but when I received the copy of the “*Harfe*” and after I had eagerly read the poems and translations I felt that like the woman in the parable who had found her lost coin I must tell all my friends and neighbors, and especially those of Pennsylvania-German extraction, of my good fortune, and though there may be nothing new under the sun and I may be carrying coals to Newcastle, yet it has seemed to me that on an occasion like this it is eminently proper and praiseworthy to do honor to the memory of this man, admittedly the pioneer in Pennsylvania-German poetry, who so nobly revealed to us the wonderful possibilities and capacities of our oft ridiculed and entirely too much neglected dialect, for the expression of the tenderness, the spirituality, profound religious feeling and reverence, intense love of home, so characteristic of the “Dutchman,” all these irradiated by that geniality, childlike simplicity, quaint humor—*gemüthlichkeit*—that fortunately has saved the Pennsylvania-German from the dark and forbidding aspects of Puritanism.

Happy they who can read these poems in the original

for no translation can do them justice: Even Dr. Harbaugh's own translations referred to are no exception, despite the undisputed finish and artistic workmanship of his English versions. "Das alt Schulhaus an der Krick," what tenderness, pathos and humor pervade the original in its vivid picturing of the humble school-houses of long-ago, so that we do not wonder that this poem has always been a great favorite!

"Die kleene Mad hen Ring geschpielt
 Uf sellem Waasum da;
 Wann grose Mad sin in der Ring—
 'Sis is doch en wennervolles Ding!—
 Sin grose Buwe ah!

"Die Grose hen die Grose 'taggt,
 Die Kleene all vermisst!
 Wie sin se g'schprunge ab un uf,
 Wer g'wunne hot, verloss dich druf,
 Hot dichdiglich gekisst!"

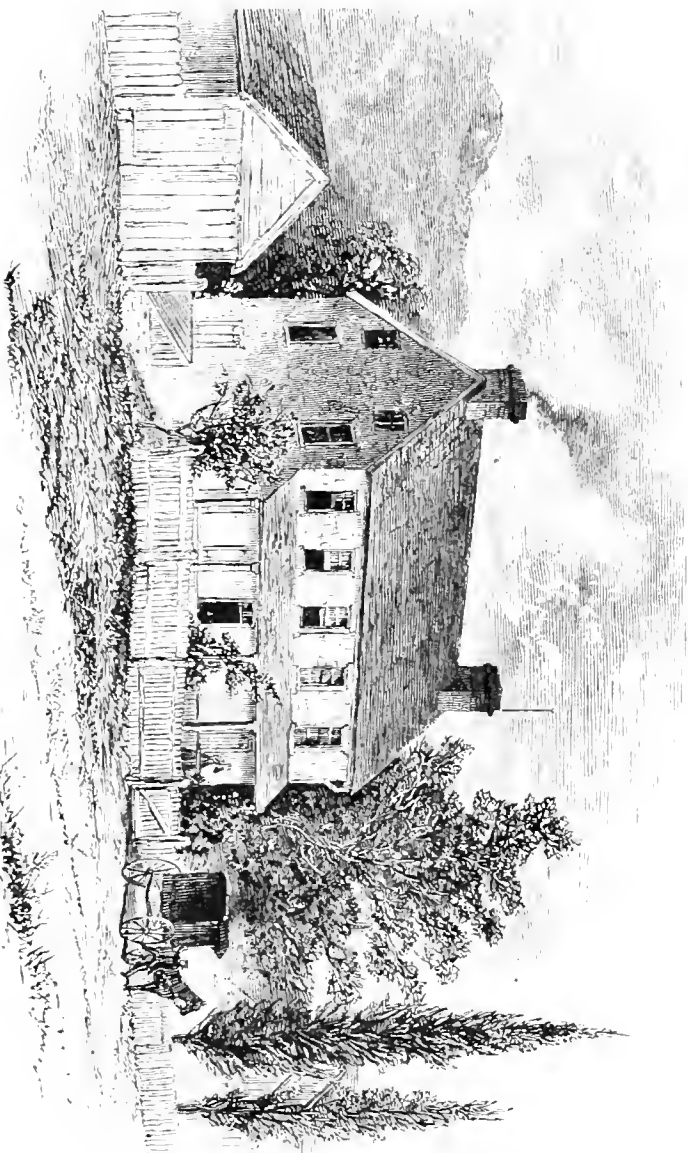
Which the author himself has translated as follows:

The little girls, of "ring" most fond,
 Their giggling circle drew;
 When larger girls joined in the ring—
 Now is it not a curious thing?—
 The large boys did it too!

The large ones always tagged the large—
 The small ones always missed!
 Then for the prize began the race;
 The one that's caught, has now to face
 The music, and be kissed!

If universality is one of the great characteristics of genius, these lines must be considered a masterpiece; for

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HOME OF HARBAUGH'S PARENTS, FRANKLIN COUNTY, PENNA.

where on this earth has there ever been a school-house where this ring kissing game of joyous memory has not been played precisely as set forth by our poet.

In "Heemweh" there is the passionate outcry of the poet in memory of his sainted mother whom he saw for the last time when as a youth he left the old homestead to carve out his own way in this wide world. There are also tender lines to the memory of a father gone before. And over all is the most exquisite tenderness, resignation and willing waiting for the joys of the home beyond, coupled with absolute faith and trust that in his Father's house all will be well.

The next poem, "Die neie Sort Dschent'lleit" (The New Kind of Servants), expresses the typically Dutch hatred for vain show and affectation, and is satirical of those country folk who ape the manners and styles of the dwellers of the city, the last verse stating the usual result in which the time-honored expedient of holding property in the wife's name is stated thusly:

M'r eegent nix—die Fraa hot's all in Hand—
M'r is ihr Edschent, manedscht Geld un Land
Un geht nau in die Koscht bei seiner Fraa!

One owns nothing—the wife has everything in hand,
We are her agents—manage gold and land
And go to board now with one's own wife.

That Dr. Harbaugh was one of those youthful souled immortal ones who as someone has said belonged to a home for incurable children, is attested by his poems, "Der Belsnickel" (The Belsnickel), "Das Kriskind" (The Kriskingle), "Der Rejeboge" (The Rainbow), "Will widder Buwele sei" (I Want to be a Boy Again),

—all of them fairly sparkling with the vivacity of childhood.

Indeed, what Burns is to the Scotch and James Whitcomb Riley to the plain, everyday folks of our own country, Dr. Harbaugh is to the Pennsylvania-Dutchmen. The so-called common, near-by things were sufficient inspiration for his themes, and thus our modern minnesinger did not tune his lyre to courtly lays as did the German troubadours of old, but sang of the gracious influences of home, so that in addition to the poems already referred to he has given us "Der Alte Feierheerd," "Der Schlof-schtub" (The Sleeping Room), "Die Alt Miehl" (The Old Mill), "Der Kerchegang in alter Zeit," everyone of which belongs to that group of which "Heemweh" is the central star.

"Der Reiche Herr im Deich" and "Busch in Schtedel" (The Backwoodsman in Town), in which latter one he sings the praises of the country over the city, and "Der Pihwie" (The Peewee), complete the collection contained in the "Harfe," although he wrote other poems, that are worthy of high praise, especially the well-known English ones, "The Mystic Weaver" and "Through Death to Life," which two his son says have been widely published and read both in Europe and America and have been recited on public occasions by persons who did not know who the author was. I confess that I was surprised, upon reading his beautiful "Through Death to Life," to recognize in it the poem I had read way back in my boyhood days in the old Fourth or Fifth Reader without ever knowing that those fine lines were written by a Pennsylvania-Dutchman. He also wrote a Child's Christmas Hymn, sung by the children of many firesides, as well as several hymns, one of which "Jesus

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DIE ALT KUNNE-MIEHL.

(THE OLD GRIST-MILL.)

I live to Thee" has taken its place in the Protestant Episcopal, Baptist and Presbyterian hymn books and in a number of other collections. Most, if not all of these poetical productions, including the ones contained in the "Harfe" were gathered by Dr. Bausman from the files of the *Guardian*, a monthly publication, in English, founded by Dr. Harbaugh and edited by him for seventeen years.

On December 12, 1866, Dr. Harbaugh wrote in his diary that on that evening he had written and sent on his last words as editor of the *Guardian*. In a little more than a year thereafter he died, but so fully was his genius appreciated that in 1868, the year following Dr. Harbaugh's death, Dr. W. A. Passavant, of the Lutheran Church, wrote to Dr. P. Schaff: "I wish very much to suggest to you the publication of Dr. Harbaugh's touching Pennsylvania-German poems. . . . I have long thought that his poem entitled 'Heemweh' was equal to Goldsmith's 'Deserted Village,' " Dr. Passavant also stating in that letter: "As a delineator of the character and life exhibited in our slow, old Pennsylvania State he had no equal."

Dr. Schaff laid this letter before Dr. Bausman, who says that but for this timely request the unique poems of Harbaugh might still lie unread, in the old files of the *Guardian*.

And Dr. Schaff in a memorial sketch of Dr. Harbaugh says: "These poems can, of course, only be fully appreciated in Pennsylvania; but in originality, humor and genuine Volkston, they are almost equal to the celebrated Allemannian poems of Hebel."

Our own Dr. Nathan C. Schaeffer, in the introduction to the life of Harbaugh, by the latter's son, pays splendid

tributes to the intellect, genius and character of Dr. Harbaugh, claiming that of all the men whom the Pennsylvania-Germans have given to the world Dr. Harbaugh was the most gifted and most productive from a literary point of view, and that the secret of his influence over young and old was found in the sterling qualities of the heart which he possessed.

"Great thoughts spring from the heart," says a philosopher. "Out of the heart are the issues of life," says the Book of Proverbs. To these conclusions drawn from philosophy and from religion should be added the conviction of Victor Hugo, himself a mighty genius, that genius is heart power. Indeed it must be so; for he who has heart power comes into closer relation with the great, sympathetic heart of God, whom we call a God of love; and the closer we, who are created in the image of our Maker, live to Him, the closer we come into harmony with our fellow man and with everything created, and no doubt, it was with this same thought in his heart that an English poet wrote those wonderfully profound lines:

"He prayeth best who loveth best,
All things both great and small;
For the dear Lord who loveth us,
He made and loveth all."

Because Dr. Harbaugh loved all things, both great and small, he reaped the inevitable reward that all things, both great and small, loved him and his works.

One of the poems in the "Harfe" that has especially impressed me as being worthy of note is that tender, vivacious, friendly, little gem, "Der Pihwie." Dr. Schaeffer in a spirit of kindest criticism hardly thinks this little poem ranks with the best of the strains struck from the

"Harfe," such as "The School House at the Creek" and "Homesickness," and that it bears a strong though, of course, undesigned resemblance to Hebel's "Storch"; but there are those who regard this "Pewee" poem as one of Dr. Harbaugh's best; for the workmanship, the artistic touch, rhyme, rhythm, melody, friendliness and comradeship are all so excellent that we are not disposed to charge anything like servile imitation or outright plagiarism; for ever since "Omer twanged his bloomin lyre," as Kipling says, literary folk, high and low, have, like a certain great English philosopher, taken all knowledge for their province and have gone a-borrowing right royally and so long as they have improved upon the original source of inspiration the literary law has been content to hold such taking as exceedingly grand larceny, dire punishment being reserved for those who are unfortunate enough to fail.

Permit me to read this little poem in the original, with apologies for mispronunciations:

DER PIHWIE.

Pihwie, pihwie, Pihwittitie!
Ei, pihwie, bischt zerick?
Nau hock dich uf der Poschte hi'
Un sing dei' Morgeschtick.

Hoscht lang verweilt im Summerland,
Bischt seit Oktower fort;
Bischt drunne Ordlich gut bekannt?
Wie geht's de Vogel dort?

'S is schee' dort uf de Orenschbeem:
Gell, dort gebt's gar kee' Schnee?
Doch fiehlscht du als recht krank for heem
Wann's Zeit is for se geh'!

Bischt doch uns all recht willkumm do;
 Denk, du bischt net zu frich,
 Der Morge gukt emol net so—
 Gell net, du klee' Pihwie?

Pihwie! wo bauscht du dess Jahr hi'?
 Kannscht wehle, wo du witt;
 Witt du am Haus 'n Platzeli?
 Ich dheel d'rs willig mit.

Ich geb' d'r neier Dreck for nix,
 Geilshoor un Flax un helm;
 Nemmscht's ennihou!—Ich kenn dei Tricks,
 Du schmarter kleener Schelm!

Dess is juscht G'schpass, mei Pihwiefriend,
 Ich rechel dich kee' Dieb!
 Hettscht mit mei'm Gold dei Nescht geleint,
 Du warscht m'r juscht so lieb.

'N Fruchtjahr ohne dich, Pihwie,
 War wie 'n leeri Welt!
 Dei Dienscht, mei liewes Vegeli,
 Bezahlt m'r net mit Geld!

Pihwie, wie'n milde Luft du bringscht!
 Die Friejohrssunn, wie schee'!
 'S gebt nau, weil du 'mol Morgets singscht,
 Kee' Winterdage meh'.

Pihwie, Pihwie, Pihwittitie!
 Bin froh, du bischt zerick;
 Nau hock dich uf d'r Poschte hi'.
 Un sing dei' Morgeschtick!

For the sake of those who do not understand the vernacular I have attempted an English translation and

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DER ALTE, WARME FEUERHEERD.

(THE OLD HEARTH.)

though rhyme has been sacrificed here and there in order to retain the more important elements of rhythm and spirit of the original, it is hoped that the translation will give at least some faint idea of what the "Pewee" is like in Pennsylvania-German:

THE PEWEE.

Pewee, peewee, pwittitee!
Oh, pewee, back again?
On this post now sit thee near me
And sing thy morning song.

In summerland hast long delayed—
Gone since last October;
Full many friends thou must have made?
How are the birds down there?

It's nice 'mongst orange trees to roam;
Say, there ne'er falls the snow?
But still you feel right sick for home
When comes the time to go!

With us thou'rt of a welcome sure;
Guess, art not too soon for me,
The morning looks so clear and pure—
Not so, little pewee?

Pewee, where dost thou build this year?
Where'er thou wilt, can'st nest;
A little place wilt have? don't fear,
My house will share the best.

Fresh earth I'll give thee free, and sticks,
Horsehair and flax and straw;
Lest thou take'st them—I know thy tricks,
Thou clever little fraud!

'Tis all a jest, my pewee friend,
No thief I reckon you!
Hadst with my gold thy dear nest lined,
I'd love thee just as true.

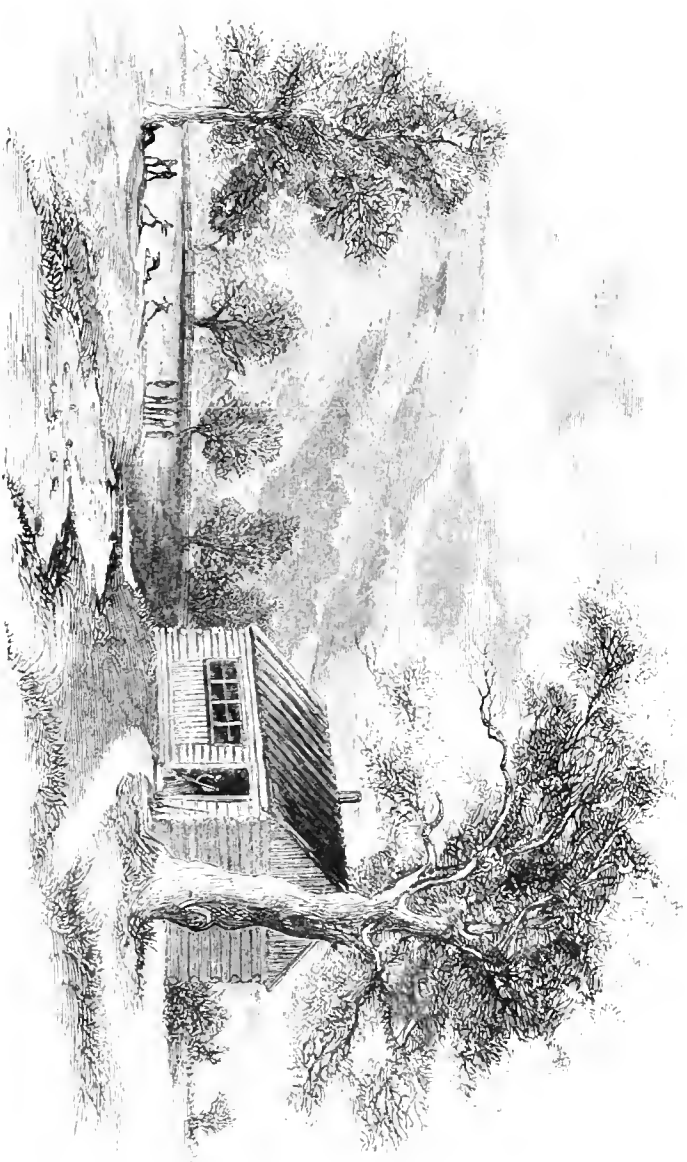
A fruit-year without thee pewee
Would be an empty world!
Thy services, sweet bird, to me,
Can no one pay with gold!

Pewee, how mild an air dost bring!
How bright the springtime sun!
And now that thou dost mornings sing,
The winter's days are done.

Peewee, peewee, peewittitee!
I'm glad thou'rt back again;
On this post now sit thee near me
And sing thy morning song!

In the early years of our poet, when his active, healthy being was surcharged and overflowing with the irrepressible exuberance and mischievousness of youth, his pious parents were somewhat perturbed concerning the future of "Unser Heinrich" as they frequently referred to him in their lamentations; for he seemed entirely too regardless of the farm and its manifold exactions, caring too much for books and wasting entirely too much time in listening to the songs of the birds, the rippling music of the brooks, the solemn chanting of the winds sweeping through the woods; or perchance, leaving the furrow, he would throw himself on his back under the shade of some friendly tree, where he would gaze and marvel at the innumerable and ever changing cloud-forms overhead—a bad thing, this habit, for the farm, but just in line with

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DAS ALT SCHULHAUS AN DER KRICK.

(THE OLD SCHOOLHOUSE BY THE CREEK.)

what these delightfully irresponsible poets—that is, irresponsible as to all gross, material matters—have been doing from time immemorial—since e'er the morning stars sang together. His was the clay animated and glorified by the immortal fires of spirituality and poetic genius, and when, in his maturer years, his kith and kin, his friends and beloved companions were witnesses and partakers of the rich fruitage of his large, clearsighted mind and his eager, earnest, generous soul; when they saw what a brave, chivalrous, unfaltering champion he was of all that was noble and beautiful and true, they no longer had any doubts about "Unser Heinrich" and fully and freely gave their meed of honor and love and praise to this poor farmer's boy, the first, and may I say the sweetest singer we have ever had in our humble, modest, yet well-beloved Pennsylvania-Dutch.

In the words of Dr. Bausman in closing his preface to the "Harfe" let me say:

"I would ask the dear readers not to hang the 'Harfe' on the willows, but to allow its beautiful tones to be heard frequently in the family circle."



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